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Sneak Peek: *The Urbanatomy Shanghai World Expo Guide 2010*

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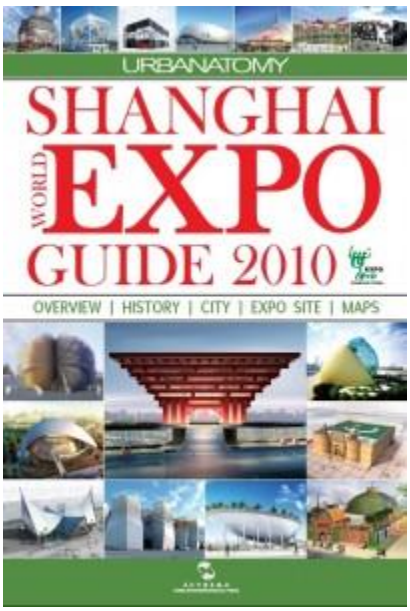

When the Shanghai World Expo officially opens on Saturday, visitors will have to negotiate the largest fairground ever constructed, spanning 1305 acres on both sides of the Huangpu River. Such an expedition requires not just a map, but a guide – and the Urbanatomy team has stepped in to provide one. Hitting shelves at Carrefour and City Shop stores in Shanghai this week, the Urbanatomy Shanghai World Expo Guide 2010 *includes maps of the Expo site, in addition to discussions of World's Fair history and background on Shanghai. Below, two excerpts from the guide's introduction, written by Nick Land.*

Expo 2010 Shanghai

Spectacle has been granted a special place in Chinese culture since the distant dawn of its recorded history. While contemporary architects and designers pursue the essence of 'Chinese style' into the nooks and crannies of specific construction techniques, its most significant and influential trait is a commitment to the production of psychological effect on a massive scale. China's great philosopher of war Sun Tzu exemplifies this continuous line of spectacular tradition, when he argues that the aim of the general is less to kill than to create an overwhelming impression on the enemy. The same thread passes through the invention of fireworks and the layout of the Forbidden City (constructed as a succession of theatrical gateways) to the glittering East Asian cityscapes of today, built almost as stage props for epic dramas of development, and painting vast panoramas in artificial light. This tradition of all-enveloping theater and aesthetic staging, vividly exhibited at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 60th anniversary of the New China in 2009, is naturally predisposed to affinity with the World Expo, an event whose very name calls for a spectacle of planetary dimensions.

As theater created on an immense scale, the Expo is aimed at an audience. Its structures are for the most part temporary, designed to make a powerful impression, to communicate, and to persist in memory, enduring not through solidity of construction, but through the effects they produce. At every level of physical organization the Expo is pre-adapted to fluidity, anticipating as many as half a million people flowing through the Shanghai Expo Park on certain days, with tens of thousands streaming through particular pavilions. Although something like a miniature city, the Expo site and its pavilions are not designed for inhabitants and their possessions, or for workers and their tools, but for visitors and their experiences. Everything is performance: transient, dramatic and informative.

Throughout Chinese history, the art of politics has always been intimately interwoven with the techniques of spectacular demonstration. This mainstream tradition is naturally focused upon Beijing, the nation's political center, whose monumental Imperial architecture consistently betrays a theatrical

design, constructed with reference to the awestruck perspective of a lowly observer, rather than for the comfort of a privileged occupant. That Beijing maintains a rare mastery in the field of grand spectacle – exhibited in the international and national pageants of 2008 and 2009 – should surprise no one.

Yet Shanghai has claims to a spectacular lineage of its own. The city's location at the mouth of the Yangzi, where it communicates between the vast Chinese interior and the open horizons of maritime commerce, makes it the natural shop window of an emerging industrial giant. History and geography intersect in Shanghai to produce a national display case, where the obscure immensities of China's past, present and future are artfully presented to foreign eyes, and no less to eyes that merely feign foreignness, in order to revel in the exotic pleasures of cosmopolitan detachment.

Shanghai is incandescent, because it manifests huge and hidden things. Economic forces and world trends of incalculable consequence are condensed, illuminated and reflected among its towers. China's film industry was born in the city, fashion flourishes luxuriantly in its streets and showrooms, the advertising industry crosses new frontiers upon the surfaces of its cityscape, and every imaginable variety of conspicuous consumption saturates its retail and entertainment spaces, converting economic potential into vivid sensation.

It has been Shanghai's irresistible fate to become a city on show, delighting in attention, and leaving no observer disappointed. Even had the World Expo been deliberately tailored for Shanghai, it could not more perfectly fit the city's tastes and unique genius. From a certain tempting perspective, the World Expo is Shanghai amplified, distilled, and celebrated, in a festival of cosmopolitan exhibitionism. Since the late 19th century, Shanghai has absorbed its status as a world city into the core of its identity. Like other world cities (New York provides the most obvious comparison), Shanghai's global significance has nourished a self-absorption that would be insufferable, were it not that the city harbors the entire world within itself, its limitless self-regard entirely ameliorated by an equally unlimited openness. For Shanghai, hosting the world is a mission so natural it almost seems an original destiny.

Better still, World Expo 2010 turns Shanghai's self-regard into a solemn obligation. The 2010 Expo theme, Better City, Better Life, firmly places urban existence center stage for the first time in the history of the event. Never before have the international wonders on exhibition fused so seamlessly with the surrounding megalopolis, making the Expo host into the principal exhibit.

* * *

Stimulation

China's economic rise over the three decades of Reform and Opening represents by far the most significant event in recent world history, and the staging of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing marked a threshold in the international, public acknowledgement of this fact. While the symbolic importance of the Olympics, as the world's greatest sporting gala, is difficult to overestimate, Shanghai's 2010 World Expo responds to the world's China fascination even more directly and comprehensively. In the first place, the Expo's economic, technological, and cultural agenda is obviously aligned with the major issues and discussion topics that naturally accompany a profound shift in the order of the world. In addition, the universally recognized status of Shanghai as a cosmopolitan gateway city, in combination with the long duration of the event and the peculiarly intense, sustained character of international participation, sets the stage for a deep and broad engagement, rather than a brief – if thrilling – encounter.

China's rise is a primarily economic phenomenon. Divergent growth rates, which have steadily tilted the world's center of economic gravity towards emerging economies in general, and developing East Asia in particular, have been accentuated by the international financial crisis. In 2010, emerging economies were forecast to grow four times as fast as rich countries (with China growing more than seven times as fast). China achieved growth of over 9% in 2009, when most rich economies were shrinking. In 2010, China's GDP expansion is expected to reach 11%.

China's strong and robust economic growth attracts rising inward investment, which is in turn accompanied by general interest, spreading from overseas economic elites to the wider public, and from relatively narrow economic considerations to a broader cultural, social and political fascination. Levels of foreign media, academic and tourist interest in China have never been higher, and Mandarin learning in schools throughout the world is rising at an exponential rate. World Expo 2010, hosted in mainland China's most open and accessible city, smoothly accommodates this flood tide of attention.

For Shanghai, a city exceptionally exposed to world economic conditions and trade disruption, the timing of the Expo has been highly opportune. Momentarily relieved from the fears of overheating that have been a near-constant companion of the turbo-charged Shanghai economy, it found itself ideally positioned to absorb the massive jolt of stimulation provided by Expo preparation, from new and accelerated infrastructure projects, event operations, and tourism. Rather than slumping into despond as export- and expat-oriented businesses struggled, Shanghai resounded to the racket of jack-hammers as it became an enormous building site. Municipal investments in Expo-related road and tracked transport construction and maintenance alone were budgeted at US$14 billion, with a further US$4.2 billion devoted to construction and operation of the Expo site. Total Expo tourist revenues are likely to exceed US$20 billion. Due to the overcast economic climate of the times, an event that might have been stressfully over-exciting under normal conditions was transformed into something unambiguously therapeutic.

The world's troubled economic times have also underscored the conceptual relevance of the Expo to Shanghai, by emphasizing the importance of industrial restructuring. As rising prosperity, environmental standards, and competition have undermined the viability of basic assembly-line industries in the city and its neighborhood, the local economy has progressively migrated into the specialized, high-margin, advanced services and manufacturing sectors that better suit its global interconnectedness, affluent and highly-educated workforce, soaring real estate values and environmental goals. The darkening clouds over the international trade arena lent new urgency to this transition, whilst further reinforcing the identification between Shanghai and the Expo, based upon a shared embrace of continual industrial revolution and its contemporary expression in the information-rich, technologically-sophisticated, and environmentally-sensitive economic activities that define the near future.

For a world enthralled by the Chinese development miracle, the geographical location, timing, theme, and topics of the 2010 Expo are further dramatized by the sheer scale of the event. Ever since the first European merchant sought to add an inch to the shirt-tails of a hundred million elusive 'Chinese consumers', the mesmerizing China-factor has been associated with raw enormity. Reckoned by civilizational longevity, geographical area, or (above all) population, China's vastness has served as a multiplier in every calculation about the country, contributing the mass that combines with developmental velocity to produce momentum (and historical impact). Among the swelling semi-popular literature explaining the rise of China to Western readers, no work is complete without a stream of graphs, figures and statistics designed to communicate the scarcely-graspable – and perhaps simply incomprehensible – scale of the process.

To be overawed by exorbitant magnitudes is an experience Western romantic aesthetes of the mid-19th century described as 'sublime'. During the era of its colossal hegemony, perceptions of American power were not lacking in this quality – a morally-neutral sense of overwhelming size, scope and energy that extends from megadeath and moonlandings to movies and McDonalds (continuing into trade and budget deficits). Yet no country on earth evokes the experience of sublimity as consistently as China, and nowhere else has it been so deliberately crafted as an artistic competence. World Expo 2010 manifests it with appropriate extravagance.

Staged in the world's most sublime city, the 2010 World Expo exhausts superlatives. Set in the most populous city in the world's most populous country, it is the most expensive Expo in history, covering the largest area, attracting the most participants, and drawing the largest number of visitors. The number of participating countries and organizations (over 250 in total), exceeds the previous record by over 50%. Anticipated visitor numbers, estimated very conservatively at 70 million, modestly exceed the previous record of 65 million (set in Osaka, 1970), but more realistic expectations are again roughly 50% higher – to quote Shanghai Mayor Han Zheng (January 22, 2010): "It seems that

our 70 million visitors projection is rather conservative … The real figure may go far beyond that projection, as 20 million tickets have already been sold and the fair is still about three months away." Foreign commentators have been less cautious, confidently predicting 100 million visitors (as US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton has done). In 2010, Expo records are not only being broken, they are being shattered.

In 2010 the Expo is undergoing a renaissance, and in being reborn it is recovering the exuberance of its classical age, when advance through excess was the mainstream of Expo tradition. If such perfect complicity between radical innovation and profound conservatism appears contradictory, it is only superficially so, since it characterizes every renaissance, whether that of 15th century Europe or late-20th century China. It is the natural state of an event dedicated to perpetual industrial revolution, and therefore of the Expo as a vitally evolving institution, as well as of Shanghai, a dynamic metropolis whose most precious heritage is modernity, and whose very nostalgia – dressed in Art Deco dreams – is already futuristic. In returning to tomorrow, Shanghai and the World Expo are jointly rediscovering their roots.

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